

NOMINATION FORM

2010 ENVIRONMENTAL HERO OF THE NORTH BAY AWARD

Assemblymember Jared Huffman will honor an outstanding organization or individual for leadership, innovation, and community service in promoting environmental stewardship.

Nominee Information:

ORGANIZATION

Organization Name: **Marin Organic**

Website:

www.marinorganic.org

Organization Address: **PO Box 962**

City, State, Zip:

Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

Phone Number: 415-663-9667

Industry:

Agriculture

WRITTEN STATEMENT:

Along with this form, please submit in 500 words or less answers to the following questions (and any additional relevant information):

How has this nominee demonstrated leadership and innovation in environmental stewardship?

What is exceptional about this nominee?

Please describe how the nominee's accomplishments have positively impacted the environment.

NOMINATOR'S STATEMENT:

How has the nominee demonstrated leadership and innovation in environmental stewardship?

In 1990, in response to an announcement that the USDA would undertake the regulation of a national organic program, a group of Marin County farmers met to discuss the need for stringent standards and a local certification program that went above and beyond the national organic protocol. Over the next eight years, these visionary leaders developed a place-based set of criteria and peer review system unique to Marin County, and in 1999, Marin Organic was founded to put their mission into action.

As one of today's most innovative leaders in the sustainable food movement, Marin Organic has become a model of how local food production can be ecologically sound and economically viable. Through unprecedented collaborations with educational and environmental organizations, food producers, consumers and local government agencies, Marin Organic has become "the national epicenter of the organic food movement," (New York Times, 2005). Over the past decade, the association's outreach and cooperative efforts have resulted in the organic certification of nearly 60 operations in Marin and an increase in organic acreage from 400 acres to close to 20,000.

From restoring riparian habitats to water conservation practices, land erosion management to protecting native species, Marin Organic has helped implement landmark initiatives, such as Salmon Safe Certification, and co-hosted ongoing farmer education workshops designed to assist its producer members in exceeding the highest level of ecological stewardship. Today, virtually every fruit and vegetable in Marin County is certified organic and our small scale farms are thriving, providing a model for the nation on how to grow healthy food in balance with nature.

What is exceptional about this nominee?

Marin Organic is a bold new concept for preserving farmland and farming as a way of life in our region. Focused on the environmental soundness and economic viability of small-scale agriculture, Marin Organic aims to foster local food production and empower local schools, businesses and communities to participate in the creation of a healthy, sustainable food shed where everyone and everything thrives.

When Marin Organic was founded, very few individuals, organizations and foundations were working to establish an alternative to the industrialized food system. Marin Organic has helped to change what was a seemingly obscure mission into local, state and national goals and conversations.

Marin Organic's flagship program, the Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program, demonstrates the association's exceptional capacity to utilize ecological thinking and existing environmental resources in order to connect the dots more wisely. From providing hands-on education in sustainable agriculture to delivering healthy, locally grown organic food to more than half the county's schools and 16 community centers, the Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program is helping create a regional food shed and directly connect farmers and consumers, including those most underserved—our children and low-income populations.

Every year approximately 20% of food grown on farms is left in the field due to overproduction or slight cosmetic blemishes. Rather than the farmer plowing the food back into the soil, Marin Organic hosts weekly gleanings supported by a team of volunteers known as the "Glean Team," who visit local member farms and harvest food the farmer can no longer sell. To date, more than 130,000 pounds of free, certified organic potatoes, squash, kale, cucumbers, carrots, zucchini, spinach, strawberries and lemons, plus donated meat, eggs, Straus yogurt and milk have been added to the lunches of Marin schoolchildren. By supplementing their weekly purchases with free, gleaned products, schools can afford local organic food while staying within their tight budgets.

By delivering food from farms within a 25 mile radius, Marin Organic lowers food miles and has a smaller carbon footprint than regular food distributors who drive across the state or further to bring food to schools. In addition, Marin Organic's truck runs on biodiesel, lessening impact on the environment.

Under the umbrella of this reputable program, Marin Organic established a Farm Days initiative in 2009, a curriculum-based exploration of food, farming and nature that emphasizes place-based learning through class visits to local member farms. On these field trips, students learn hands-on about organic agriculture and its benefit to the environment and their own nutrition, and help harvest food for the Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program. By fostering increased ecoliteracy at an early age, Marin Organic helps inspire future generations to care about where their food comes from and how it is grown. It's a win-win-win for the student, farmer and the environment!

Please describe how the nominee's accomplishments have positively impacted the environment.

Time and again, studies have documented the health and environmental benefits of organically grown food—and it's not just the absence of chemical pesticides and herbicides. Organically grown produce consistently tests higher than non-organically grown foods for vitamins, minerals, and other micronutrients, as well as containing much lower levels of nitrates, heavy metals and other contaminants.

Certified organic operations cannot use any Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) in any level of their production. This relatively new technology is little understood and inadequately tested to ensure consumer safety. The consequences of crossing species barriers, which is impossible in nature, are unknown, as are the risks to human health and the environment.

Organic agriculture is founded on building and maintaining healthy soil. When pests become a problem on organic farms, growers use Integrated Pest Management methods, which actually enhance the overall biodiversity and health of the ecosystem by introducing beneficial pests that restore nature's balance. Organic farming also protects other resources, such as water. Rich organic topsoil has a huge water-holding capacity so less water is needed for irrigation. Finally, by not using harmful chemicals on the farm, waterways, rivers and streams are kept cleaner, benefiting all living things.

In addition to the myriad of environmental benefits of organic farming, Marin Organic producers go even further to protect the county's natural resources and ease their carbon footprint: Albert Straus of Straus Family Creamery uses reusable glass milk bottles which so far have prevented over 10 million pounds of waste from going into landfills. In 2004, he even installed a methane digester that converts byproducts of his herd's manure to electricity. He now powers his creamery entirely from this extremely renewable resource, including his electric car! In 2009, MacEvoy Ranch completed the installation of its very own wind turbine. The 95-foot turbine, along with the installation of new solar panels, will produce more than enough power for the entire ranch. And when they aren't using all the juice to make Marin's finest, award-winning organic olive oil, the wind still pumps into the grid. Finally, Warren Weber of Star Route Farms is building a holding pond on his property in Bolinas designed to store excess water in the winter, thereby decreasing his impact on the water table in the dryer months to come. By decreasing the farm's need for irrigation from communal sources, Star Route will ensure that the flow of local waterways runs uninterrupted, encouraging the return of native salmon species to Marin County.

By fostering the economic viability of organic practices and supporting local farmers, ranchers and artisans that demonstrate the highest level of environmental stewardship, Marin Organic has profoundly impacted the environment—from the purity of our soil, water and air, to the enhancement of biodiversity, to the protection of threatened and endangered species. Through collaborative efforts, landmark initiatives and public outreach and education, Marin Organic continues to raise the level of ecoliteracy in this region, impacting our communities locally, and providing a model for other regions and nations worldwide.